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Visualising the game frame: constructing political competition through television images in referendum coverage.

Abstract: The strategic game frame, which is a media construction of political events as strategic competition between opponents, has so far been operationalized and measured primarily through verbal indicators. This study extends the operationalization of the frame to television visuals. The article argues that visuals are just as powerful as words in conveying the game frame, however this can go unnoticed and thus unchallenged, if we focus on analyzing verbal content alone. Visuals should thus be problematized and systematically embedded in empirical studies of the game frame. This qualitative analysis shows how this can be done and, specifically, identifies elements of *mise-en-scène*, such as setting, actors, camera movement and props, which can constitute empirical indicators for the strategic game frame in television texts. The article uses data from the coverage of a recent referendum in Scotland to illustrate these indicators in use with examples.

The strategic game frame is one of the most widely used analytical concepts in the study of election and referendum media coverage. It describes news and current affairs content which represents political events as a contest between opponents (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Whereas most empirical studies operationalize and measure this frame primarily through verbal indicators, this article makes a contribution to the field by extending its application to visuals and seeking to identify which aspects of televised images manifest this frame.

The article systematises and includes in the operationalization of the strategic game frame visual elements, such as the arrangement of the setting, the positioning of key actors, props and camera movement.

This visual aspect of the game frame is important because visual information is just as influential as verbal content, if not more so, in shaping impressions and knowledge. Television viewers use both verbal and visual cues to make sense of political coverage, but they remember images better than words because the former tap on “a non-rational aspect of experience”, and evoke emotional responses more effectively (Grabe and Bucy, 2009: 15). Therefore images are effective in communicating frames without viewers realizing it (Fahmy and Neuman, 2012).

This article proposes that elements of *mise-en-scène*, namely the way that components such as setting, actors, costume, props and camera movement are organized (Gibbs, 2002), translate visually the features of performance, competition, winning and losing, which characterize the game frame. It suggests that *mise-en-scène* functions as a framing device and can thus be used to analyse audiovisual coverage of political events, such as elections and referendums. The article contributes to scholarship by extending Cappella and Jamieson’s (1997) commonly used indicators for this frame into the moving image.

The examples used to illustrate these visual indicators are from the television coverage of a recent referendum in Scotland. All the content analysed is factual, from news and current affairs programmes. The article does not intend to answer questions about the mediated construction of this specific referendum though. Rather it uses generic instances from its coverage to exemplify the type

of elements of *mise-en-scène* that may carry the game frame more generally.

In the following sections, I first explain how the strategic game frame, which is the central focus of this article, has been conceptualized and operationalized so far, and how visuals have not been explicitly included in this operationalization. I subsequently argue that this omission is significant, by discussing academic work that stresses the role of images in conveying meaning more generally. Following this, I review framing research which does address this role by exploring visuals in frames other than the strategic game frame. I propose that the concept of *mise-en-scène* can usefully synthesise the types of elements scholars have identified as indicators of different frames, and I argue that *mise-en-scène* is a framing device. I then discuss the methodological approach this study takes in identifying the aspects of *mise-en-scène* which specifically manifest the strategic game frame.

The strategic game frame

Framing is a process of selection and emphasis of some elements of a topic over others in representing and explaining what an event or issue is about, what are its causes, and what can or should be done about it (Entman, 1993). Frame analysis is an established analytical approach in media studies. Media frames define what is going on by supplying a 'central organizing idea [...] that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989: 143). Different frames on the same issue propose different versions of reality, by shifting 'emphasis in salience of certain aspects of a topic' (de Vreese, 2002: 4).

The strategic game frame is a 'generic' frame, namely a frame which can be identified in a range of different contexts (de Vreese, 2012). It originates in the work of Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and represents political processes (and particularly elections where most of its empirical applications may be found) as a competition between opponents. It puts emphasis on who is winning and who is losing, what strategies they employ to win, and how they perform in the 'horserace'. Different studies refer to it as the 'strategy frame/schema', 'game frame' or 'strategic game frame', and these terms tend to be used interchangeably in the literature (Aalberg et al., 2012). Although its focus on war and game metaphors may suggest that it constructs politics as conflict, news that contains the strategic game frame does not necessarily emphasise the elements of conflict and negative campaigning, but rather those of competition and political performance (Pedersen, 2014).

A range of studies in different national contexts (Robinson, 1998; Lawrence, 2000; Iyengar et al., 2004; de Vreese and Semetko, 2004; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006; Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2011; Dunaway and Lawrence, 2015, among others) have found the game frame to dominate political coverage in both elections and referendums. Most of this empirical work uses as evidence of its presence in the news the indicators cited by Cappella and Jamieson. These include an emphasis on '(1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics, and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighing of polls and the candidates' standing in them' (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997: 33). Game

framed news consists of stories where 'the game of the campaign provides the plot of a story; polls promote and support strategy coverage; the electorate is positioned as spectators of candidates who are performers' (ibid). Although the significance of visual bases to frames is acknowledged (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997: 47), neither Cappella and Jamieson nor subsequent scholarship explain how the above criteria translate into visuals.

Images however are an important - though often neglected - component of framing, no less on television, which remains the most widely used source for news (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015). Indeed, despite the fact that the term framing is itself a visual metaphor, very little research has explored how frequently encountered 'generic' (de Vreese, 2012) news frames, like the strategic game frame, are manifested visually. A notable exception is Fahmy and Neuman's (2012) visual operationalization of the war and peace journalism frames, where they expand Galtung's (1986) original generic concepts to incorporate indicators that visually emphasise human suffering, death of civilians, anger-turned-into-violence, peace negotiations and young subjects.

In a similar vein, this article extends Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) operationalization of the game frame into visual aspects of televised coverage and explores the following research question:

RQ1. Which aspects of televised images manifest the strategic game frame?

First though, the next section explains why media visuals deserve analytical attention in the first place, by discussing academic work that highlights the role of images in conveying ideological meaning more broadly.

Media images and social values: why visuals matter

Barthes (1977) was one of the early writers to point out the significance of the rhetoric of images in media texts. Like language, he explained, images work as signifiers in syntagmatic relationships, and the connotations these signifiers evoke in their combinations with each other carry ideological meaning (p. 161-162). Similarly, Graber (1989) suggests that images are central in how television constructs reality for audiences and they are more likely to be remembered than verbal content. She calls for research that explores how images in the news may alter the way frames are understood, by evoking cognitive 'schemata to supplement information supplied by the story' (p.148).

The potential of language to convey ideology is generally more likely to be scrutinized because the relationship between the linguistic form and the world it represents - or between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' (De Saussure, 1960) - is easily perceived as socially determined. On the other hand, although images also construct versions of reality, they tend to be perceived by viewers as 'analogical' representations (Messaris and Abraham, 2001), even though they are not. In other words, their inherent constructedness and ideological nature can escape scrutiny because they physically look like the objects they depict and,

consequently, they are *perceived* as 'truer' representations of reality, what in Peirce's (1991) terms is defined as containing an 'iconic' dimension.

In addition to this iconic resemblance, images also have an 'indexical' relation (Peirce, 1991) to the object signified - a photograph is convincing partly because it is a trace (or has an existential relationship with) its object/signified and therefore it seems more reliable. A third reason why images are persuasive but often unnoticed framing devices is that, as opposed to language, they let viewers supply the syntactic connections between what they see, since visuals lack 'an explicit propositional syntax' (Messaris and Abraham, 2001: 219). This means that they can make implications, which would be controversial if made in words (ibid). Looking at images as framing devices therefore matters because it puts these implicit and unnoticed processes under scrutiny.

Outside the framing paradigm, the ways images convey values through the syntactic relationships of their components was systematically studied in social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). This approach extends concepts from Halliday's systemic functional grammar to explain how the grammar of visuals, just like that of language, can be ideological (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:14).

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) approach shares with frame analysis a concern with social values in media content, but works differently in technical terms. Whereas their approach explores how the inherent features of visual structures construct power relationships across different contexts (for instance being systematically positioned as subject of action conveys power to an actor), frame

analysis works by conceptualizing specific framings of a particular event (for example an election may be framed as a strategic game), which comprise an interpretative package (Entman 1993) with specific indicators, which are used to determine its presence in a text. The theoretical and empirical analysis of the game frame in this article identifies new visual indicators for this frame, and is not a broader study of power relations in texts. That said, Kress and van Leeuwen's work insightfully draws our attention to the meaning of visual structures, which is also important in framing, as the next section will suggest.

Although several framing theorists list visuals among the devices that comprise media frames (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1993), most empirical framing studies do not explicitly discuss visual elements as framing devices (Matthes, 2009: 355), but conceptualise frames and measure their prominence based on verbal content alone. This omission is significant because, as argued above, the power of visuals in conveying frames can go unnoticed and unchallenged, if we focus on analyzing verbal content alone.

Among the few studies within the framing paradigm that have looked at visuals as part of frames, none focuses on the strategic game frame specifically. However, I will discuss their findings subsequently and I will suggest that what they have looked at in relation to different frames is, in fact, different aspects of *mise-en-scène*. This observation informs my own argument that *mise-en-scène* works as a framing device and should be part of how we operationalize frames.

Identifying visual elements of frames: *mise-en-scène* as a framing device

As will be demonstrated below, the few empirical studies that do include visuals (still or moving) in their conceptualization of various frames tend to use three types of indicators: a) *syntactical evidence*, namely the way images follow one another or combine with what is communicated in the accompanying verbal text, b) evidence relating to *how images are set up*, namely who and what appears in the foreground and background and what actors are depicted as doing, and c) evidence relating to the *perspective* from which images are shot, namely camera angle, movement, and length of shots.

In this section I will first demonstrate that the above elements are indeed used as evidence of different frames in empirical analyses of both photographs (still images) and videos (moving images). Following this, I will argue that these elements can be usefully combined under a single concept by looking at *mise-en-scène* as a framing device.

In studies of the still image, syntactical evidence, image set up and perspective (as each was defined above) have all been seen as indicating frames. For example, Hardin et al. (2002) explore how the number of photographs used in magazine stories, camera angles and types of activity of male and female subjects frame gender in sports photography. Similarly, in her case study of the framing of a social movement, Kensicki (2001) measures how often different actors are depicted, the camera angles and editing of pictures, what different actors are shown doing, whether they are shot alone or in groups, in the foreground or background of pictures. King and Lester (2005) examine U.S. newspapers'

framing of photographic coverage of wars, by recording the number of pictures, their perspective, size and placement in the newspaper.

Similar elements also appear as frame indicators in studies of the moving image. Parmelee (2002) explains how the set-up of scenes depicted in US presidential candidates' promotional videos syntactically supports the verbal narratives of these videos. Messaris and Abraham (2001) explore how the juxtaposition of images that accompany an ABC report on urban pathology syntactically connect the run-down urban neighborhoods the report discusses with images of race.

Focusing more specifically on *journalistic* coverage of elections, Woo (1996) argues that the proliferation of images of Korean election candidates appearing like celebrities in front of large, cheering crowds holding balloons and placards, draws attention away from the policy issues of the election and frames it like a celebration rather than a political event. Grabe and Bucy (2009) suggest that US television visually frames republican and democrat candidates as 'ideal candidates', 'populist campaigners' or 'sure losers'. In operationalizing these frames, they use all the types of visual evidence outlined earlier (syntactical evidence, image set up and perspective). For example, they explore how syntactic relationships between images and between images and text confer positive and negative qualities to presidential candidates, by 'associational juxtaposition' (p.102), how the set-up of a single image may also confer specific qualities, how close-ups create intimacy, while low-angle views attribute power.

In their effort to systematise how we go about identifying frames in visuals, Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) propose a four-tiered framework consisting in looking at visuals as denotative systems (who/what is shown explicitly in a picture), as stylistic-semiotic systems (stylistic conventions like camera angles and moves), as connotative systems (the symbolic meaning and ideas connoted by what is shown), and as ideological representations (the interpretation of how images serve ideology and social power). Of the types of framing elements I discussed in this section, analysing an image's *set-up* and *syntactical relations* can be categorized in this model's first tier, while looking at camera *perspective* involves the second, stylistic tier.

These two first tiers of visual framing can further be usefully combined under *mise-en-scène*, a well-established concept in visual studies. This consists in 'the contents of the [camera] frame and the way that they are organized' (Gibbs, 2002: 5). It includes setting, lighting, costume, colour, actors (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004), but also camera position and movementⁱ, which are essential in how viewers access a scene (Gibbs, 2002).

I thus propose that *mise-en-scène* operates as a framing device because, as seen in the research reviewed in this section, the composition of scenes, the position of actors and objects in it, the position and movement of the camera convey frames. The advantage of analysing these elements under one overarching concept is that it allows us to explore how they work together in conveying meaning. Therefore *mise-en-scène* as a framing device is more than the sum of its elements, because it highlights how these elements interact. Based on the

above discussion, I expect that the strategic game frame will also be manifested visually through mise-en-scène.

Identifying how elements of mise-en-scène may operate and interact as indicators of the strategic game frame is the focus of the rest of this article. The subsequent analysis draws on and extends this frame's conceptualization, by specifying elements that translate visually its central features.

The proposed visual indicators are illustrated through a qualitative analysis of coverage of a recent referendum. The purpose of this analysis is not to answer questions around how the specific referendum was framed, but to demonstrate with real examples how elements of mise-en-scène translate the central characteristics of the game frame.

Sample and method

The coverage analysed is of the final month (18 August-18 September) of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum campaign, broadcast on BBC Scotland and STV, the two broadcasters catering specifically for Scottish audiences. The referendum, which asked voters to decide whether Scotland should become independent from the United Kingdom, was the most significant political event in Scotland that year, with an unprecedented 84.6% participation in the vote. Competition between the pro- and anti-independence campaigns was particularly tight in this final month, as polls predicted a close result (Barford,

2014). The intensity of the competition and the overall significance of the vote make this an ideal case study to explore manifestations of the game frame.

The analysis consisted in two parts. First, a total of 64 hours of Scottish news and current affairs programming (the BBC's daily *Reporting Scotland* and *Scotland 2014*, STV's *News at Six* and *Scotland Tonight*, as well as all special referendum programmes shown in the final month of the campaign) were subjected to a content analysis using Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) criteria (outlined earlier) to identify the game frame in the entire coverage of the final month. This revealed that 70% of the coverage (250 news and current affairs items) contained the strategic game frame, often in combination with other frames.

In order to identify visual indicators for the game frame, which the original set of criteria does not specify, I then narrowed down my focus and rewatched all items (n=250) that fulfilled one or more of Capella and Jamieson's indicators, looking for recurrent visual patterns that express the game frame in the moving image. I present these patterns subsequently and illustrate them with examples from the coverage.

This sample is appropriate for the purposes of the study, because the aim of the analysis was not to discover whether or not the strategic game frame was present in the coverage, but to identify, systematise and include in its operationalization visual aspects of televised content, which manifest the frame. I therefore focused on content that was game framed so as to see how this framing was additionally conveyed visually. All examples used to illustrate the

elements I identified represent recurrent visual patterns in the sample.

The analysis contributes to literature by systematising these visual aspects of televised coverage, so that they can be used as indicators manifesting the game frame. The analysis is qualitative: I follow Gamson and Modigliani's (1989: 11) suggestion that, in trying to understand how visual imagery may work as a framing device, researchers should 'present enough rich textual material so that readers can form their own independent judgments on the validity of [the] argument' and qualitative analysis is therefore appropriate.

Below I present an analysis of excerpts from news and current affairs programmes. All the examples presented in the analysis represent imagery commonly found in the television coverage of elections and referendums (leaders' debates, campaign trail coverage), rather than content that was particular to the case study. For instance, the images of campaign trail coverage analysed are characteristic of what campaign trail coverage looked like overall in the sample, but are also typical of such reportage across the genre of election/referendum coverage (see for example Woo, 1996, for descriptions of similar images in campaign trail coverage in Korea).

Visual elements of the strategic game frame

Each of Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) indicators of the game frame cited earlier was expressed visually in the analysed sample through mise-en-scène. Figure 1 shows the four components of mise-en-scène (namely setting, lighting,

costume, colour, actors, camera movement), which I propose express visually the game frame. Under each of these components, the figure lists their specific manifestations that convey the frame. For example, props may include betting slips and sport gear (borrowed from the imagery of sports) or autographs and 'fan' t-shirts (borrowed from the domain of performers and supporters).

The present section will explain how these elements correspond to Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) original indicators, as these were outlined in the 'strategic game frame' section. The next two sections will then illustrate how the elements in figure 1 were expressed in examples of coverage analysed, and how they came together in different combinations to convey the frame.

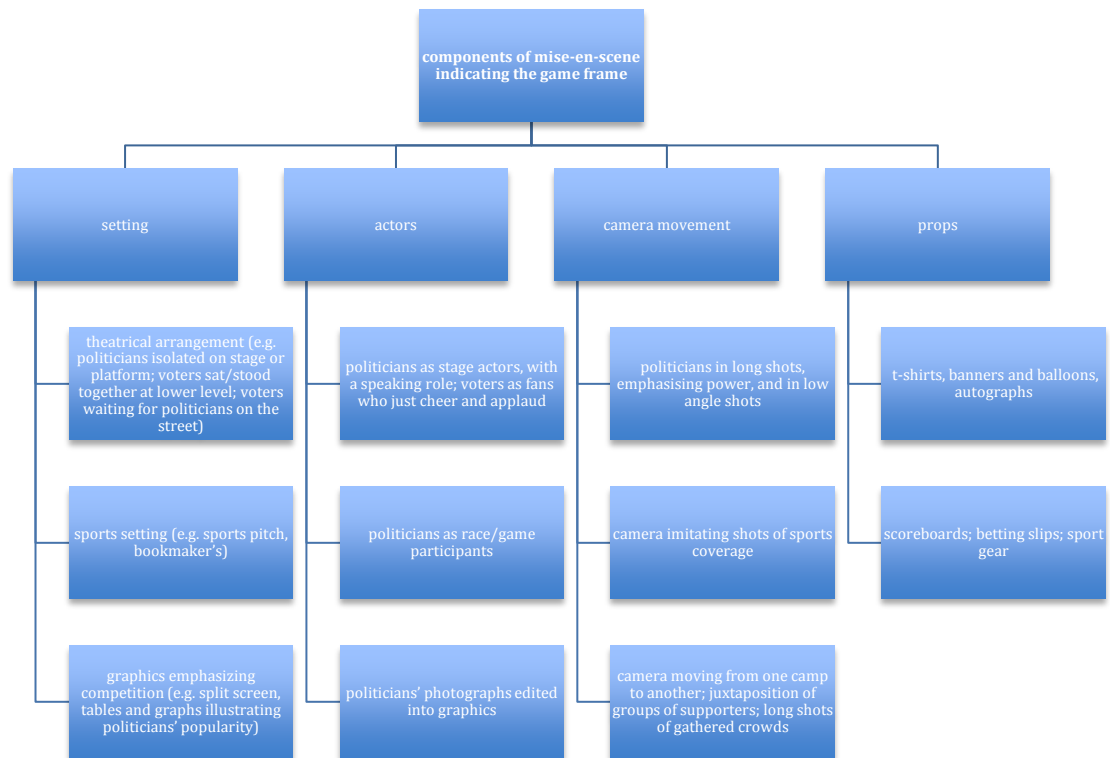
The positioning and centrality of the politician as a performer, the emphasis on their enactment style and the construction of the electorate as an audience evaluating their performance (indicators 3 and 4 of the game frame) were conveyed visually by images where politicians are shown performing on a stage with members of the public watching or applauding the performance, or politicians are received as celebrities by groups of 'fans', depicted as tangible evidence of their success in the contest (figure 1). In the former case, politicians are literally positioned in a setting associated with performers (stage), while the latter images mirror the way performers are received by fans off stage, on the street or the red carpet.

The language of wars, games, and competition (indicator 2 in the original criteria) was manifested through visual metaphor or juxtapositional association

of the campaign coverage with images of sport, race, betting and game. In language, metaphor proposes an association between two conceptual domains which are not literally connected (Goatly, 2007). This association may be expressed visually by juxtaposing images from different domains (the campaign and sports/betting), or representing one conceptual domain through images that we normally associate with another domain.

The emphasis on winning and losing as the central concern (indicator 1) and the weighing of polls and the candidates' standing in them as evidence of their potential to win (indicator 5) were expressed through graphs and charts illustrating polling results and juxtaposing images of the opposing camps in the competition. Both are ways of emphasizing that a campaign is not just an exchange of political views but a contest.

Figure 1. Mise-en-scène: visual indicators of the game frame



Images like these are typical in much television coverage of political contest. The subsequent analysis does not suggest that it is surprising that such images were found in the sample, but rather that their role in conveying the game frame is often overlooked when prioritising verbal content. The point the following discussion makes is that these images are in fact expressions of the strategic game frame and that mise-en-scène should be incorporated into its conceptualization. The visual indicators proposed in figure 1 promote the same causal interpretation, problem definition, and moral evaluation (Entman, 1993) as the indicators identified by Cappella and Jamieson (1997). They thus deserve consideration and scrutiny in empirical analyses of the game frame.

In what follows, I use excerpts from the coverage to illustrate the visual indicators presented in figure 1. These examples convey visually the two main

elements which, as discussed above, are central in the original indicators of this frame: competition and political performance, the latter representing a key factor differentiating politicians' standing in the competition. Performance is part of the narrative of the game frame, according to Cappella and Jamieson (1997), because it can alter a candidate's or campaign's chances of winning the race. Thus several of the examples below focus on this element of the politician as a performer, as well as on elements emphasising contest and sports imagery.

The role of setting and actors in conveying the game frame: theatre and sport imagery

Setting may convey the game frame by alluding to theatre and sport imagery and by positioning the key actors of the event, namely politicians and voters, as theatre/sport performers and fans respectively. I will demonstrate how setting and actors work to convey the frame visually, through three examples below.

On 25th August 2014, BBC Scotland hosted the second of the campaign's televised referendum debates, where representatives of the Yes and No sides presented their positions in front of an audience. Yes Scotland, the campaign supporting Scottish independence, was represented by Alex Salmond, at the time Scottish First Minister and leader of the SNP, the biggest party in the Yes campaign. Better Together, the campaign arguing against independence, was represented by Alistair Darling, Chair of the campaign and former Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Televised leaders' debates provide an excellent case of game-framed coverage, because they are essentially competitions among political opponents with one of them eventually declared victor (Baker and Norpoth, 1981). For this reason, they provide fertile ground to identify visual elements of the game frame. They are seen as focusing viewers' attention on candidate style and strategy (Shephard and Johns, 2013), and as such they are viewed as consistent with a political culture, which prioritizes performance (Coleman, 1998).

Leaders' debates form an essential part of television's campaign coverage and are acknowledged as such by broadcasters themselves (Dekavalla, 2016). Although they are not strictly 'news' coverage, these debates are staged by television channels (at least in the UK), and produced by the same teams responsible for the overall coverage of the campaign, but, unlike news bulletins, here broadcasters control all the parameters of how the event takes place. Therefore, these debates provide a good context to study how television frames political deliberation. Although the context of the independence referendum was set in Scotland, the visual structure the event followed was comparable to that of leaders' debates internationally.

The set-up of this type of debate follows a standard format, which is so common that its role in conveying the strategic game frame goes unnoticed. Political leaders stand side by side on a stage, facing the audience sitting in theatre arrangement, like actors in a play or teachers in a classroom. This composition of space in itself emphasizes the role of politicians as stage performers and thus works as a visual manifestation of the strategic game frame. The electorate, on

the other hand, is positioned in the setting as an audience, visually signifying that they are there to observe a performance, not to participate in an exchange. Even though audience members ask questions, their role is restricted. This corresponds to Cappella and Jamieson's (1997:33) criteria for the game frame: 'a story with performers, critics, and audience (voters); centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate'.

In line with this, the room where the debate of the 25th August took place was in theatrical arrangement with the politicians appearing on a stage (image 1). The two leaders rarely looked at their interlocutor when addressing each other – they consistently faced towards the audience and the camera both when they asked each other questions and when they responded to these. The act of addressing the audience/camera and not the anchor or the other politician on stage constantly reminded the viewer that this was not a conversation, but a performance for the cameras and the electorate in the room and at home.

Image 1 here. BBC Scotland: Scotland Decides - Salmond versus Darling. 25 August 2014.

The role of the other key actor, the audience in the room, was that of nameless, generic members of the electorate (image 1). Their identity as a group was emphasized by the fact that they sat close to each other (whereas the politicians were isolated on the stage) and they were not asked to give their names when asking a question. Although leaders interrupted each other and asked follow-up questions freely, audience members put their hands up to request permission to speak, like students in a classroom, and permission was not always granted.

After a leader responded to a question from the audience, the audience member who asked it did not speak further, again emphasizing the power differential. The main means the audience had to react was by applauding when they agreed with something said. Applause was another cue pointing to a construction of the debate as a theatrical performance.

The elements of setting and actor roles discussed above (namely the theatrical organization of space, the isolation of politicians on the stage, and the positioning of voters as passive, anonymous listeners who don't speak) are also encountered outside formal leader debates. A second example where the spatial setting of the scene positioned politicians as performers comes from the coverage of the campaign trail.

On 15th September, *STV News at Six* led with a package showing both campaigns' activities for that day. Here Alex Salmond was shown speaking to a gathered crowd in a street in his hometown. Even though the location was outdoors, the theatrical setting was replicated with Salmond standing isolated on the steps of a building and members of the public positioned together as a mass, at a lower level. Again, the audience as an actor was passive and only applauded and cheered. Similar scenes were shown later in the same bulletin in a story featuring the No campaign, and were generally common throughout the day-to-day trail coverage.

One could argue at this point that politicians are, in fact, the main protagonists of election and referendum campaigns and their prominence in such settings, both

in official debates and campaign trail speeches, is normal. Equally the framing of a campaign as a game between politicians may also appear natural: it can be argued that political campaigns are, in fact, competitions between politicians, so there is no particular framing there. However, to frame is not to impose a new meaning on an event that it does not already have – it is to select one meaning that an event already has and to emphasise it over other aspects that it also possesses. The game frame's emphasis on politicians as the key performers of the democratic process draws attention away from the fact that elections and referendums, apart from political competitions, are also public consultations, involving citizenry deliberation, participation and empowerment (Robinson, 1998).

Apart from types of setting reminiscent of theatrical performance, other manifestations of the game frame in the sample involved sports settings. Such imagery metaphorically associated the political campaign with actual sports like football or racing, playing on the idea of politicians and their campaigns as competitors. The language of games and competition, which is one of the original indicators of the game frame, is here matched by the imagery of games and competition, demonstrating that news visuals construct interpretations of events just as much as words do (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). This imagery was not only chosen by news producers; it was also part of media opportunities organized by the campaigns themselves, as will be shown in the next example.

On 3rd September, *STV News at Six* featured a package with footage from a football match between senior figures of the Yes and No campaigns, organised to

support a motor neuron disease charity. All scenes were set up in a football pitch, *dramatizing* the game of the campaign as a football game (image 2). Politicians, the key actors, were constructed as competing athletes: players who scored celebrated by rolling on the ground and being cheered by fellow players, while at the end the footage featured sequences similar to those of post-match interviews in professional games. In the foreground of image 2 for instance, Ruth Davidson, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, was positioned like a professional footballer. The package finished with a shot of several photographers taking pictures of the teams, as would happen in a real game.

Image 2 here: STV: STV News at Six. 3 September 2014

Although this piece may have been intended as light-hearted, it still reinforced a construction of the referendum as a game between opposing camps through metaphor (Black, 1962): characteristics such as competition, attack, defence, victory and celebration, which are connoted by the literal understanding of a football match, were evoked visually and transferred to the referendum campaign through setting and actors (image 2).

Similar sport/race metaphors were evoked visually in a piece shown on the night after the leaders' debate discussed earlier, on 26th August, on STV's main Scottish evening bulletin (*STV News at Six*). The report began with a shot of the bulletin presenter. To her right was a graphic where images of Alistair Darling and Alex Salmond were digitally edited to appear next to each other. Between them was a box like the ones on the ballot paper, and above them a heading read

‘Referendum 2014’. By juxtaposing their photographs, this image represented the referendum as a contest between the two leaders, rather than as an electorate’s decision on a wider question.

An initial introduction by the anchor was followed by a blue screen with the Scottish flag in the background and a table with three columns in the foreground. In the first column appeared pictures of Alex Salmond and Alistair Darling, in the second column were their names, and in the third two percentages: 71% and 29% respectively (image 3). The two political actors were thus placed inside the setting of the graphic, through the insertion of their pictures. The table’s title was ‘Who won?’ and at the bottom an ICM poll of 25/8/14 was credited as the source. Another table from the same source appeared subsequently, entitled ‘How will you vote?’ and gave Yes 49% and No 51% of the vote.

Image 3 here: STV: STV News at Six. 26 August 2014

Whereas the imagery of the charity football match earlier dramatized the game of the campaign, the tables are ‘images which demonstrate’: graphs are often used on television news as evidence supporting truth claims (Lury, 2005: 18) expressed by a voice-over, which in this case was suggesting that Alex Salmond was the winner of the debate and that his performance impacted voting intentions. Referencing an official poll contributed to the credibility of the visual.

This syntagmatic use of ‘images which demonstrate’ in combination with a verbal narrative (voice-over) about who won functions as another manifestation

of the strategic game frame, and particularly of its aspect that involves using polls as measures of performance. At the same time the two leaders' pictures inside the table further reinforce a construction of the referendum as personal competition between these actors.

Later in the same package, the setting changed to a wall inside a branch of Ladbrokes, the British chain of betting agencies, as the voice-over explained how bookmakers were receiving bets on the outcome of the referendum. The effect of this setting was to associate the referendum to a race or sporting contest: by visually connecting a story about political debate with a setting where bets are usually placed on the outcome of sport matches and races, the setting suggested that this event was also a race.

Having explored how the positioning of setting and actors conferred qualities of performance and competition to the campaign, I will now discuss how two other elements of mise-en-scène, camera movement and props, may reinforce this framing.

The role of camera movement and props in conveying the game frame: conferring power and celebrity status

Camera movement and perspective conveyed the game frame in the coverage by shooting political leaders from angles which conferred them power (low angle) and emphasized their role as performers (long shots). Props borrowed from the domains of sports and celebrity complemented the other elements of mise-en-

scène. I will demonstrate with examples below how camera angles and props can work to support the construction of a political event as game and competition.

In the leaders' debate and the coverage of the campaign trail, which were both discussed in the previous section, long shots were used often to depict leaders, especially when moving from one to the other or from them to the audience, which was rarely shown in long shots. According to Lury (2005), choosing to present someone in long shot can have the effect of placing 'the viewing audience away from the performer/character/ individual, as if they were on a stage'. In both these examples, the leaders were actually on a stage, as seen in the previous section, and the camera perspective reinforced their framing as performers.

For example, when Alex Salmond answered questions by audience members, during the leaders' debate, he tended to step in front of his lectern and move his hands to illustrate his points. Each time this happened, the camera moved into a long shot including his whole body (image 4), thus putting emphasis on his entire performance. Most shots of the leaders showed them alone, detached and physically removed from the audience, further increasing the emphasis on the power differential between performers and audience (Kensicki, 2001).

Image 4 here: BBC 1 Scotland: Scotland Decides - Salmond versus Darling. 25 August 2014.

While leaders were mostly shown as powerful performers, audience members were often shot as a group from above so that the camera could take in the size of the audience. This also stressed their inferior power position (Grabe and Bucy,

2009). Their volume as a mass was emphasised more than their identity as individuals. When an audience member asked a question, the close-up shot included several other people around them. This further stressed their group dynamic (Kensicki, 2001) and their secondary role in the political process.

Camera movement was used in similar ways to attribute power to politicians as performers in the example from the campaign trail discussed in the previous section. That package started with footage of Alex Salmond meeting supporters on the street. The shot initially showed standing supporters carrying banners and balloons. As the politician walked towards them they all faced in his direction and cheered. This functioned as an indication of where in the scene the focus of the viewer should be and who the 'star' was. Long shots then showed the size of the gathered crowd, again emphasizing their mass volume. When the politician was later shown addressing the gathered crowd, he was filmed from a low angle, a perspective which emphasised his power (Kepplinger and Donsbach, 1990).

Scenes of festivity in which a politician is the center of attention, arriving like a famous performer among a group of cheering fans, are often found in the coverage of elections (Woo, 1996). The rise of the politician as a celebrity, whose relationship with voters resembles that of performers in the sphere of entertainment, is a well-documented phenomenon often attributed to the central role of the media in how politics is conducted (Street, 2004). This construction of political leaders as performers and of voters as audiences, however, is also consistent with the central role of 'performance, style, and perception of the

candidate' within the game frame (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997: 33). As mentioned earlier in this article, the game frame views performance as a factor contributing to politicians' chances of winning. If, as argued before, the leaders' debate was framed as a performance on a theatre stage, the campaign trail is constructed here as the red carpet.

Apart from camera angles, which were examined above, props were also very important in supporting the construction of the campaign as a game in most of the examples analysed. For instance, the footage from the bookmaker's branch, which was discussed in the previous section, featured a wall with four signs pinned on it (image 5), outlining the chances the bookmaker's gave of a high turnout and a yes/no outcome. Next to these signs on the same wall were cases holding betting slips. The signs and betting slips were 'borrowed' from the domain of race betting, and reinforced the metaphor conveyed by the setting of the piece. Similarly, the example of the football match discussed earlier also featured a number of props supporting the visual metaphor, such as football uniforms, a ball, goal net, and scoreboard.

Image 5 here: STV: STV News at Six. 26 August 2014

Balloons, banners and autographs were further props that supported the construction of the campaign trail as performance. On 17th September, BBC Scotland's central news bulletin led with a package reporting on the activities of both campaigns that day. The package began with a screen split in two: one side showed blue balloons with Yes printed in white, while the other side featured a

purple banner reading No Thanks, the slogan of the Better Together campaign (image 6). Balloons and banners, the visual props connected with party supporters, were replaced in the next shot by images of Yes and No supporters sharing the same split screen. This split of the screen in two visualized the split between the two opposing camps and is consistent with a framing of the event as a contest. The balloons and banners contributed to constructing voters as fans.

Image 6 here: BBC Scotland: Reporting Scotland. 17 September 2014.

This was followed by a scene featuring more props borrowed from the domain of performers and fans: Alex Salmond signing on the boot of a parked car next to two supporters in Yes t-shirts who presumably requested the autograph. The politician was once again framed as a performer and this time the prop that made this connection was the autograph.

The above footage, like other material discussed earlier, derived from publicity events staged specifically for the media by political communications teams. The centrality of senior campaign figures in the coverage and their favourable framing as popular leaders with cheering supporters is typical of the way campaign consultants strategically frame candidates in their television appearances (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). However, as banal as this imagery may seem, I have argued here that it also reinforces a framing of the political process and its outcome as depending on performance, while the gathered audience, the banners, the cheering and the applause function as visual measures of how

successful the performance is. Voters are constructed as audiences rather than as participants in democracy.

All the elements of mise-en-scene discussed above (setting, actors, camera movement and props) combine to support the game frame, in the same way that Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) original indicators work together rather than in isolation. I propose therefore that the elements in figure 1 can be a useful part of studying the game frame in the moving image, in combination with the original verbal indicators.

Conclusion

Kinder (2007: 158) argues that empirical research often treats frames as 'represented by a single presentation of a sentence or two, reminders of how an issue might be understood', when in fact they are more complex models consisting in many elements, at the same time textual, conceptual and visual. The media representation of a campaign as a game between political sides is not only achieved through verbal content but also through images, though this was traditionally neglected in theoretical and empirical discussions of the frame.

This article has addressed this issue by extending the operationalization of this commonly found generic frame to include visual indicators. The components of mise-en-scène proposed in figure 1 comprise an additional set of indicators for the game frame, which fits with and complements its original conceptualization, and can help deliver a more complete picture of how the frame is manifested in

future empirical studies. The article also made a case for studying different visual framing elements under the concept of *mise-en-scène*, in order to better appreciate the ways in which they interact and reinforce each other.

The empirical analysis, on which these indicators were based, found that the strategic game frame is conveyed through a combination of the setting on screen, the positioning of actors, the movement of the camera and the props that appear in news packages and in longer form programmes, such as leaders' debates. Although these findings derive from the coverage of a specific campaign in Scotland, the images described in the analysis are not unique to the specific context, but rather represent familiar ways in which television reports on political campaigns. Scenes from the campaign trail or from leaders' debates just like the ones discussed here also appear in research on elections in other contexts (see for instance Woo, 1996; Warner and McKinney, 2013). The list of indicators proposed in this article represent the basis for an analytical framework that includes visuals in the operationalization of this frame and which may be applied in different contexts.

In theoretical terms, the article has drawn our attention to rather banal imagery of televised campaigns and problematized its role in framing politics as elite contest and performance, rather than as a democratic participatory process where citizens have an active role. The game frame in itself is consistent with a liberalist view of democracy as a debate between elites, where the role of the citizenry is that of an audience, or followers who elect representatives to manage public affairs, but do not have any other control over public matters (Hackett,

2005). Because the strategic game frame emphasises political strategy and competition over deliberation and citizen participation, it has often been accused of compromising democracy, of placing citizens as spectators of the political process, encouraging cynicism and distrust of politicians, and contributing to ill-informed, disengaged audiences (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Lawrence, 2000).

This article has shown that ordinary visual representations of elections and referendums on television, which may at first appear natural and normal, convey an understanding of the political process as a contest between performers rather than as public decision-making. The article has made a case for scrutinizing and problematizing these representations, which often go unnoticed when they are communicated visually.

The strategic game frame is one of the most developed and applied frames in the literature on political media coverage, and thus enables comparisons of coverage across different cases and national contexts. The present study has contributed to developing new ways of thinking about it and applying it, thus responding to calls for a better understanding of how images may function as constituents of frames (Graber, 1989). The article has also argued for unlocking the richness of insights that may be delivered by studying *mise-en-scène* as a framing device.

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ⁱ Bordwell and Thompson's (2004) definition of the term does not include camera position and movement, however Gibbs (2002) successfully argues that these are essential components of how scenes are viewed.

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